



ARTIST

Jessica Labatte

TITLE

Glass Drawing #4 - Skaneateles, NY

DATE

2014

DIMENSIONS

20 in H x 24 in W

MEDIUM

Inkjet Prints

IMAGE NOTES

Inkjet Print

CATALOGUE NUMBER

2014.092

CURRENT LOCATION

2024-19B

JESSICA LABATTE

BORN

1981

BIRTHPLACE

Salt Lake City, UT

GENDER

Female

CITIZENSHIP

United States

CULTURAL HERITAGE

European-American

LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Artist-in-Residence, 2014

LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

Contact Sheet 182

BIOGRAPHY

Jessica Labatte was born in 1981 in Salt Lake City, UT and currently lives and works in Chicago, IL. She received a MFA and a BFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Labatte's photographic work is an investigation in the capabilities of space within a two-dimensional frame. Her work contains both sculptural and painterly nuances, however the work from conception is always a photograph. Labatte experiments with large format analog processing techniques, which can give the illusion of digital affects. Yet, her prints have had no digital manipulation, a keystone of her artistic practice. Labatte is represented by Horton Gallery, where she has been featured in a two person exhibition and at Art Brussels. Labatte is currently an adjunct professor at Northern Illinois University.

ESSAYS

Jessica Labatte has always prided herself on achieving real illusion through photography, having never used Photoshop to construct her optically challenging, forever faltering, studio constructions and still-life images. While this statement is still true, perhaps it is now better phrased that Labatte has never used Photoshop for artifice. Her most recent series, Spotting, uses the software to expose a necessary lie. Though the images are affected — and their believability altered — by the program's input on the picture, the interface is not used for illusion, but rather for utility. The works operate like a digital excavation that weaves in and out of focus — looking into and on top of the image at once — in fields and swaths of color that present a contemporary digital photo process. The slippages that occur in the appearance of the photograph — between the flatness of the image and its apparent depth, paired with the initial elusiveness of their construction — resist fitting into the lexicon of modern abstraction, though the gestures that compose the images are themselves painterly. Just as the archeologist carefully preserves the object of a dig, Labatte unearths a different type of artifact within the "found" image — a type of forgotten civilization that is missing from the canon of art history her work aesthetically fits into: the city of the lost image. The experience of viewing the works in Spotting replicates the process of "discovering" an image that existed within the photograph all along, a type of method-driven Atlantis born out of materials, revealing a new category of representation in the process. Here, the veritable proof of the image depends on the trust that the desired effect already exists within the picture, not outside of it. The works themselves are created through an unintended process; the image is "ruined" as equally as it is enhanced by the very act of trying to correct it. The artist requested that her images (multiple exposure still-lives made out of construction paper) be digitally cleaned to rid the exposed image of dust, which is often unavoidably developed within the scanning process from film to digital media. During her residency, Labatte gave this necessary, yet time-consuming, responsibility to her interns — asking that a mask be applied to the picture and each fleck of dust be cautiously removed using a correction brush. Once the image was completely perfect, each error and inaccuracy eliminated, Labatte inverted the masked layer, exposing every gesture, every mark of the attempted cleanup job. The gestural marks that envelope the image — small and meticulously precise dots, large haphazard swaths of a curved brush, tightly coiled circular motions — are exposed evidence of the process needed to make the image perfect. The photograph is caught in the act. The idea of correctness is not an altogether new concept for Labatte. Just as in her previous works, her aesthetic is only ever complete when the image is purposefully and evenly unsettled, when a *mise en abyme* is struck between the materials and the photographic processes themselves. This exact disruption of space is essential to the flawlessness of how Labatte's images are consumed. Several previous pieces come to mind, particularly *The Brightness*, from 2010. Spotting does in digital space what this piece does through physical construction; endless layers of painted paper, cut through and installed behind, occupied the length of the artist's studio. In a grid of vertical and horizontal linear windows, vibrant reds sit on the surface of the sheets, looking through to piercing blues painted directly on the wall, pulsating oranges are set against deep greens. The resulting photograph, visually processed through the optical mixture of warms and cools, is a completely flatted space — so much so that to hear that the image was created in a dimensional site seemed an affront to the viewer's perception. The same approach is taken in her *Untitled* works from 2012, which feature shards of broken mirror angled against a stark black background, using the rear of her studio as a stage to reflect expanses of inkjet printed gradients that are brightly lit. Flatness is a common device that Labatte uses to disarm viewers; though the compositions appear Romantic and lyrical, they downplay the attitude that body and mind are separate. Instead, Labatte caters to both — the viewer's eye (optic body) and mind (spirit) are used as equal tools. Despite their formal qualities, Labatte's images are intensely conceptual — not in the sense of external formats or ideological frameworks surrounding a theme, but in the experience that takes place in the viewer's mind while looking at the piece. The concept of the performative action is always present. Passive viewing is impossible, participation is essential: The imagination of the viewer is as important as the work itself. Spanning all of her previous work, and in Spotting in particular, Labatte's images are made through embracing error itself — specifically optical error and spatial error, but never logical error. Indeed, her works are intensely logical, even in their approach to illusion. Here, as in past examples, the visual fracture of the image carries the potential to be uncovered — partially hidden, yet never out of sight. Stephanie Cristello

Stephanie Cristello is a writer and curator currently living in Chicago, IL. www.stephaniecristello.com Jessica Labatte lives in Chicago, IL, and completed her residency at Light Work in June 2014. www.jessicalabatte.com